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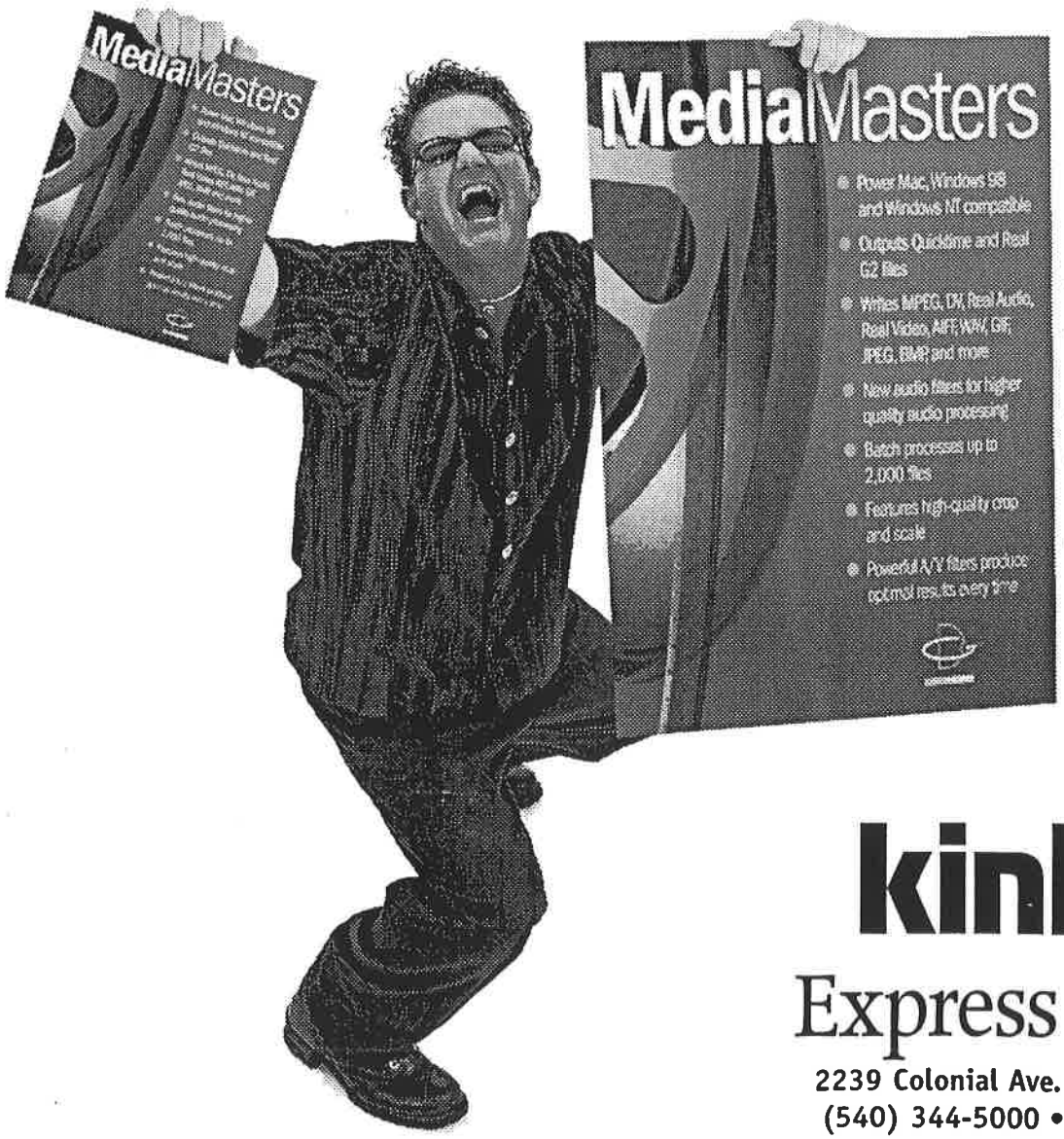
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FENCE

ISSUE NUMBER 5
SUMMER 2THOUSAND

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FENCE WEBSITE/EMAIL
fence.tsx.org

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PUBLISHED BY CONTENT OVER PLOT
POB 19136, ROANOKE VA 24019

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ARSE IMITATES LIFE

By Wile E. Peyote

Soundtrack by
Brian Porterfield & Cheap Trucker's Speed

Technically, We're a year old, now.
It was a bright Thristy Thursday in Salem when Plato, Bobs and i shook hands in agreement that the first issue of FENCE would debut by Independence Day, 1999. Plato, being British, and i, being Texan, while relatively unmoved by any sense of nationalism, nonetheless agreed that it would be a fine gesture indeed. So, in the presence of their wives and my trusty lawyer, A. Tom McLiver, the pact was set.
We failed miserably.
Perhaps miserably is too strong a word, but then again, i'd only be consoling myself. Issue 1 of FENCE was put together in less than 2 days, much of it mined from older, more obscure 'zines, and tossed together punk as fuck, stapled in one corner. There were 75 or so copies, and for a while it even cost money. In defense, i can honestly say that it was a fine example of our letterhead : Content Over Plot, but, in truth it was alot like one of those dreams where you think you're about to pee, you're even in the bathroom with matters well in hand (or however the situation is covered...) in your dream and you wake up at the last pissible minute. Not as bad as the old "falling" dream, but potentially worse.
We could have been potentially worse. Fortunately, Mssrs Shrimp and Johnson were roused enough to rally 'round the grill and we have since come to produce a fine, if not enviable, magazine.
So what does one year mean? i dunno.
We do plan to host and present our very own version of the Roanoke Valley's Best & worst, complete with certificate. I guarantee you, dear reader, that we will show you the true opinion of a Roanoker.
By all means, Stay tuned.
Also, there's huge news abrew for music: The return of The Stimulants, the release of the Diplomats CD, and i'm anxiously waiting for the Farm Dysfunction wheels to start a-rollin'. The AudioEther network is up like a new colt, but it's up, and submissions to FENCE are growing. This means good things, folks. We're doing just fine, and we have each other to thank. This weekend will be the biggest opportunity to show ...ummm...'scene solidarity" yet: the all day events of the Indep Music Festival and the all-night rout of Festival in the Bar. Make sure you're around for some of it, there's really no excuse not to, even if you've Been in New York all friggin week...

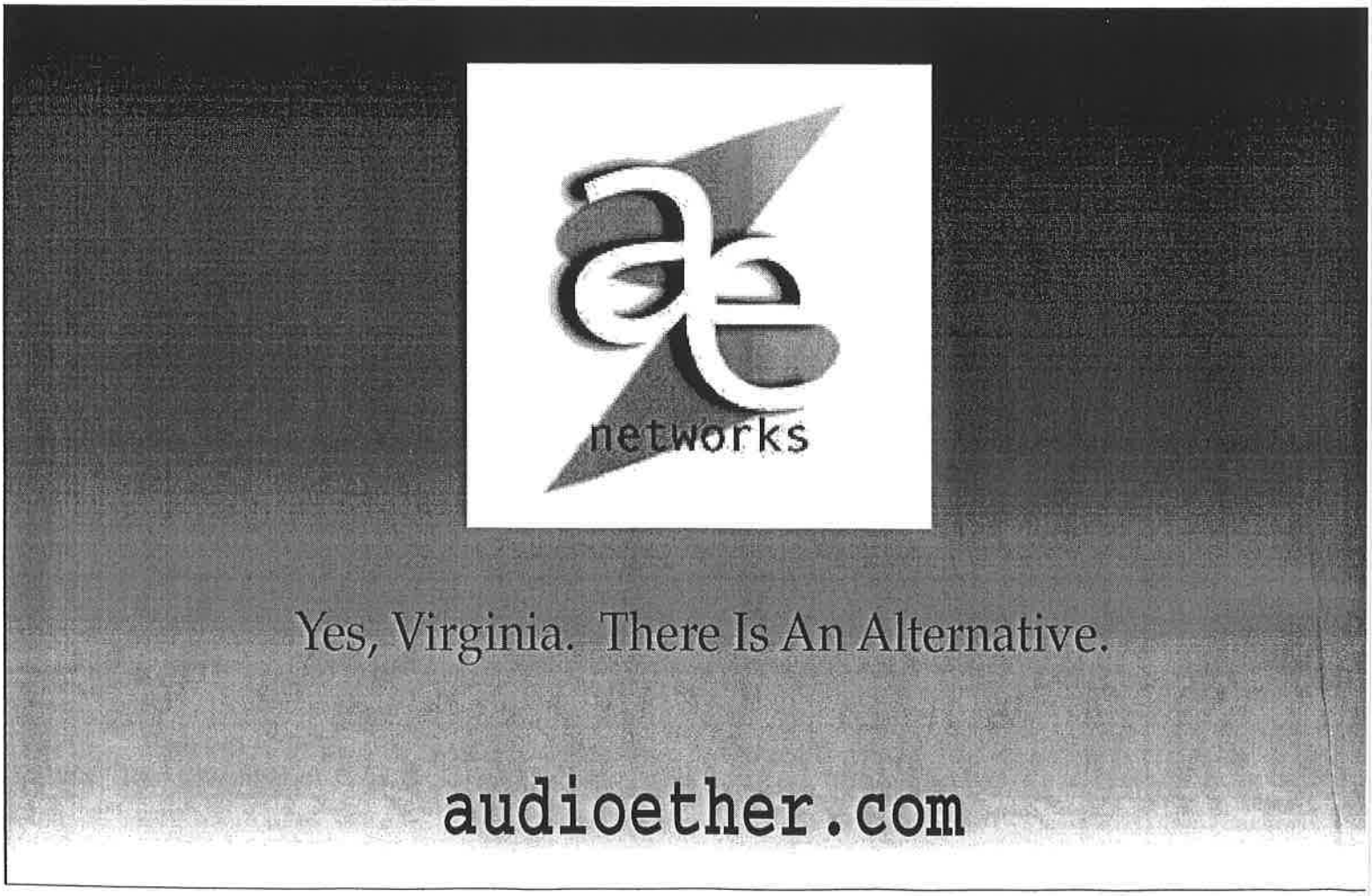
We have a website, BTW, and on it you will be able to find a link to every artist, band and organization that we mention throughout the issue. If you want more info, now you have it. There's also pics from some shows and general website sillyness. If you want a copy of any of the pics, drop us a line. We're easy.
See you in a couple of months... and thanks.
No, really.

7 Things You Didn't Know About... The Fashion Smoothies

Billy Chase – vocals, guitar
Brian Holt – bass, vocals
Chico – drums

1. The Fashion Smoothies were first conceived as a solo project. Members were eventually bribed into the band by Mafia Hit men from Boston, Mass. and moonshiners from Franklin County.
2. The band name originated from the English word "fashion", and the health craze drink the "smoothie". Together they define this cool-sounding band name.
3. Brian can down a beer in four seconds, do a keg stand for two minutes, and sing "I Walk The Line" with the greatest of ease.
4. Chico has been playing drums for as long as he's been in the band. That would add up to two years.
5. Chico and Billy of the Fashion Smoothies are not the same Chico and Billy who own that cool pizza joint. Chico and Billy still love you.
6. Billy was inspired to play guitar by the movie "Back To The Future." It was during the Under The Sea Dance scene where Michael J. Fox busted out "Johnny B. Goode" that mad him want to play.
7. If you were to mix Orange Soda, Razzmatazz, half-n-half, Vodka, and ice together, you would also get a Fashion Smoothie.

Check out the Fashion Smoothie links on the FENCE web site.



"Your Job is Boring – Embezzle"

By **Wile E. Peyote**

Uberpranksters or bandana-masked saboteurs? Agents for the neo-anarchist activist group ®™ark (pronounced "artmark") barely keep a low profile, but it's always a hazy one. Since 1990, they've accomplished at least 25 acts of "creative subversion" on a national level, and countless others in and around their own (and each other's) backyards. These acts range from well-executed witticisms and practical jokes to balls-out aggression against corporate America. Most recently, they made headlines for two very pointed political parodies on the 'net, namely a pair of websites that masqueraded as the official sources for the WTO (www.gatt.org) and Presidential candidate George W. Bush (www.gwbush.com). These prompted G.W. Bush to loose the dogs of internet regulation, and to suggest that "there ought to be limits to freedom." Who are they?

®™ark's mission is to end corporate abuse of the democratic process through creative sabotage, or, as they call it, "cultural hacking." Although this readily suggests the use and abuse of the WWW, it is far from limited to that terrain. ®™ark also holds the view that property damage is a 'nonviolent' activity, though their definitions of property are less tangible than, say, a Starbucks window. Agents have spliced movies with educational footage, and rigged ATM machines with signs reading "Nothing for Beggars on Fridays," and "Your Job is Boring – Embezzle." ®™ark supporters around the world have snuck into museums to replace audio tour tapes with snippets of socially progressive talk. They were behind the campaign tagged "Barbie Liberation," which swapped the voice boxes between talking Barbie and GI Joe action figures. When the e-commerce giant eToy tried to shut down a Swiss art collective called etoys.com, ®™ark staged an internet "sit-in" that successfully stunted legal proceedings. And it may be coincidence, but the massive data jam that big commercial web sites experienced in February had the distinctive flavor of ®™ark handiwork.

Since ®™ark made the logical step to go on-line in 1997 (www.rtmark.com), operations have been even bigger and better. Previously limited to pamphlets and word of mouth, now anyone can access with the ease of getting a chicken recipe. The site functions in both English and Spanish, and channels funds from donors to agents and workers looking to complete 'projects'. Such projects are organized into eight 'mutual funds', each addressing a different subject. The Frontier Fund, for instance, is focused on the effects of global trade on indigenous cultures. This is not UN-level stuff, either. It's as close as Mexico and, some in the chat boards argue, California.

The site also enables and encourages people to join in impromptu think tanks, subscribe to anonymous mailing lists set up to foster communication about funds and projects, or chat with ®™ark agents, workers and donors about how each project is going. You just can't pry into the organization itself. Corporate execs have referred to the site as "Satan's Temp Agency," and members of the press pursue agents like sleuths.

"We're a diverse group of individuals," says ®™ark spokesperson Candid Lucia, who, like the majority of the group, uses an assumed name that can change repeatedly, even over the course of conversations. "We're mostly professionals, mostly with dull lives and rather unglamorous and banal day jobs." With six white-collar professional administrators scattered across the country, ®™ark is a vaguely small, no-paperwork operation which could, according to Lucia, simply close shop and disappear in five minutes, should the need arise.

Yet for all of the shadowboxing and intrigue, their obscurity was all but blown out of the water by the Seattle WTO protests. WTO director Mike Moore lashed out at ®™ark's copycat WTO site on the front page of the real WTO site, prompting the international media to push ®™ark into revealing their much-lauded underground masterpiece. "Our site was intended to provide in-depth information about the WTO," says Lucia. "We expected them to make a link to our site."

This might seem like a pretty cheery response from a group denounced as rogue and anarchic. Touting a motto like "dead persons tell no lies" doesn't help, but at what point is an organization like ®™ark lumped in with the rest of the anarchist groups who have been fighting for years against big business and the excesses of global capitalism?

The 56-year-old anarchist writer John Zerzan has admitted the confusion as well in previous discussions about ®™ark. "There are so many different ways of looking at anarchy. I kinda wonder what they mean by it. It's so elastic a term." ®™ark shares a few ideologies with Zerzan, but they are indeed few. ®™ark agents try to work from within the system, while Zerzan and his colleagues prefer to keep a safe, solid distance. Zerzan, who is somewhat of a demigod amongst West Coast anarchists, is skeptical of technology, while ®™ark makes the most of it. Where Zerzan finds fault with an irresponsible public, ®™ark seeks out reckless corporations. "We have great regard for the founding laws and democratic principles of our country," says Lucia. Furthermore, few of ®™ark's projects are ostensibly political, and are limited to those cases where big-name corporate products (like G.W. Bush or the WTO) interfere with free process.

"The Seattle thing tied us inexorably with Zerzan in the media's eyes. All those kids running around in hoodies and black bandanas was certainly an exhilarating statement, but, because of those images, there came a point on the national horizon where we all became the same. We all became just a bunch of pissed-off kids updating the 60's riots with a better soundtrack," exclaims notwolf, another pseudo-named ®™ark worker.

Yet because of those images, both groups are seeing a surge in popularity. Zerzan believes that the young anarchists he sees flocking to the areas in and around Eugene, Oregon (the town he calls home) are disillusioned by a warping American Dream that amounts to working at McDonald's and watching the WWF. Even college is no longer an escape as schools become more corporate, and MTV continues to dress the complacent masses. They're looking for answers.

®™ark is in full agreement, but with a surprisingly idealistic twist. "No one knows any better," says notwolf. "They may feel like something's wrong, but without information, it's just another pang." Says Lucia, "People are sick of corporate greed and corruption, but if they weren't informed they'd be at the mall shopping, or watching TV."

Know Your Rights

Exclusive news by Fence reporter **Paul Meadow**

With a silent nod, the heavy ram slams into the door with a large crash. The group of well-armed men excitedly begins to get louder as the ram slams home again, but the door won't budge. One more time to the lower hinge does the trick. Eight men rush in past the crumpled door, guns drawn, screaming something in Spanish.

Suddenly, a naked, frightened man runs by the invading force. Through the kitchen ... "Stop!" ... and into the living room ... "Hit the ground!" The naked man, maybe in his early sixties, quickly complies. In another room, a woman, also in her sixties, also frightened, is face down on the floor. Guns are pointing at her head.

After a few short moments, the dazed and frightened man begins to regain his senses. "I got up enough nerve to get up." Says Bill Summers, who was that man. "And one of them asked me what was my name. I told them what my name was. Then one of the town officers spoke up and said, 'Well we got the wrong address.'"

The Pulaski Police Department actually had the right address, just the wrong information. Chief Herb Cooley said a "reliable informant" gave his department information that a group of Hispanic men had set up a crystal methamphetamine lab in the southwest Pulaski duplex. With warrant in hand, the department raided the house early May 22nd.

"I'm disgusted," says Summers, who was streaking for the phone to call 911 when he was ordered to the ground at gunpoint. "There was an automatic weapon pointed at my head. I didn't know what they were going to do."

Later, an officer told the Summers family that they were sorry, but that information given them by their "reliable" source proved not only to be a mistake, but a flat-out lie. "An officer told me that their informant had lied to them about what was in my apartment," says Summers.

Chief Cooley is embarrassed: "We got taken, and they got taken. That's the bottom line," he said. Cooley is embarrassed. As it turns out, his "reliable informant" is a local landlord. A man who Cooley says came to them to help: "He said, 'Hey, I see all sorts of stuff. I can help you.'" Help he has. Cooley says the informant has helped build 14 felony cases. He's even testified in court. And because of that proven record, Cooley says he had no reason not to believe him this time as well. "He just flat out lied to us. We were as surprised as anyone to find, well, a man and his wife in there."

As if things couldn't get any worse for the Pulaski Police Department, Summers says he told police there were no Hispanics living there, but there were some living "next door." Realizing a serious mistake was in progress, the SWAT team ran out of the Summers' front door which led into a hall where there was another door. Wham! The heavy boot partially knocked in the door. There was a crash.

The officers had taken Bill Summers too literally. He had meant 'next door' as in the adjacent dwelling, not 'the next door,' which was the Summers' bedroom. The large crash was their dresser hitting the floor. Pulaski P.D. was now 0-2.

"I was gonna get my .410 shotgun, I would've loaded it, and I would've turned loose with it." Imagine that scenario. If Bill Summers had managed to get one shot off, the pellets from his .410 would have posed little threat. The response, of course, would have been fatal. All this on the word of an informant.

Since the botched raid, the informant has been arrested and charged with providing false information to the police. If convicted, he faces up to a year in jail and a $2500 fine. Chief Cooley also wants to see him pay for all of the costs of the raid, including the officers' overtime.

But one thing still isn't clear. Why would this 'good Samaritan' purposely deceive the police into unwittingly raiding the wrong house? Cooley thinks part of it may be the informant's imagination, that "he may have got caught up in all the cloak-and-dagger stuff." But other sources in the department say a leading theory is far from an informant's overactive imagination. The source says the police department thinks two drug investigators, who are about to be relieved of duty, may have conspired with the informant in an effort to embarrass the department. If that's the case, it worked. But what if something had gone wrong?

The thought of what could have happened raises a very serious question: How can hearsay, offered up by a confidential informant, be enough to suspend one's constitutional rights? In this case, the Fourth Amendment right to protection against illegal search and seizure. Maybe not in this case, but considering that most informants are themselves crooks, how can information provided by a criminal be enough probable cause for a judge to issue a warrant? It's hard to imagine (or is it?) that your constitutional rights can be suspended so easily, but it happens all the time.

Much of the time, information coming from a snitch proves to be good information. But what will it take before the system re-evaluates the flimsy notion that the word of a crook is enough to infringe on your civil rights? If this story had been about an innocent old man shot dead in his home because he chose to defend himself, maybe then the subject would be on the table.

See you at the bar! – *P.M.*

"When they knock on your front door, how you gonna come, with your hands on your head, or the trigger of your gun?"

Guns of Brixton – The Clash

SHOW REVIEW

Swank
Nervous Lowly
The Fabulous Dragons
Winterset

at The Club (Fiji Island)
16 May 2Thousand

By Wile E. Peyote

After arriving far, far too early, I secured a seat and Mr. Shrimp secured the appropriate libations. Finding a suitable booth amongst the red carpeting and mirrored walls meant one where we could hide our drinks, since it was an all-ages show, and the vociferous drinkers were consigned to the confines of the bar proper. Then we waited patiently for the festivities to begin. An hour later, we were still waiting, but with less patience and an overwhelming desire to drink some more. As the crowd slowly swelled, the bands continued to threaten to take the stage, until, at 9:00pm, the first did. **Winterset** launched into their set, ringing with dissonance and dual vocals reminiscent of that early-90s D.C. P-rock sound – a kind of broken swirling melody and screaming (not howling) vocals. Don't misunderstand me, I really liked it, that's why I've been with it for almost ten years now. They do their 'loudquietloud' quite well, and I'd go see 'em again, given the chance.

In their favor, the only real minus to their set was having to stop in the middle of the second song to accommodate some coconut shrimp-eatin' berks upstairs in the restaurant, but that's hardly their fault. When the show resumed (another hour later), Winterset picked up exactly where they left off. Good of the band, piss-poor planning on the part of the club. Are a pair of South Roanoke pretties more important than 150 supporters of local music? Something to keep in mind. But I digress...

The **Fabulous Dragons** took the stage next, and I mean 'took'. Pounding out nothing less than a sonic portal to the glory of 70s rawk, this Richmond gang rolled through an amazing guitar-driven pre-punk set which completely ignored Iggy and Uncle Hank. This was Robin Trower's revenge on those snotty, sneering Sex Pistols. I even wondered aloud why Jimmy Page hadn't documented his babysitting gigs on the side, which earned me a bemused smirk from Mr. Shrimp, and a comment of which all I could translate was "..Hoople". It was Rock, and it was good.

Swank getting all lit up.

There's no denying that around the Fence offices we all love **Nervous Lowly**, so I would be hard-pressed to give these guys a bad review. Fortunately, they haven't given us a reason, yet. But that may be coincidental with the fact that we only see them play in bars. Opening their set by hyping the release of the latest Sonic Youth CD, the Lowlies shamelessly fly that obvious influence like a pair of pasties on an amateur-night stripper. And that's a good thing. The added bonus of the full sound system at their disposal made it even better. Loud is good.

Finally, long into the night, **Swank**. The band took the stage, the crowd ringed the stage, and Roanoke's most eclectic band did what they do best, which, even in a review, can lack description. Now this isn't to say that they're set for a good bronzing, but as diverse as they are, and as talented as they are, they've got a little bit for everyone, and no end in sight. I tried to describe Swank a few years ago over the phone, and the best one-worder I had was "horn-core". I can't say that the horns make the band, but I can't say that Swank would be the same without them, either. If there is a defining point to the band, it would have to be in the front man, Chad.

Chad, playing guitar, singing and easily the most recognized member, shines not because of any of those things. His best part is that he lets everyone else shine. Sure he's hot, but without the horns, he's Eddie Vedder. Without the stampeding drummer behind him, he's Adam Durowitz, and without the other guitars and vocals to balance him, he's Davey Matthews. But, without him, what's Swank?

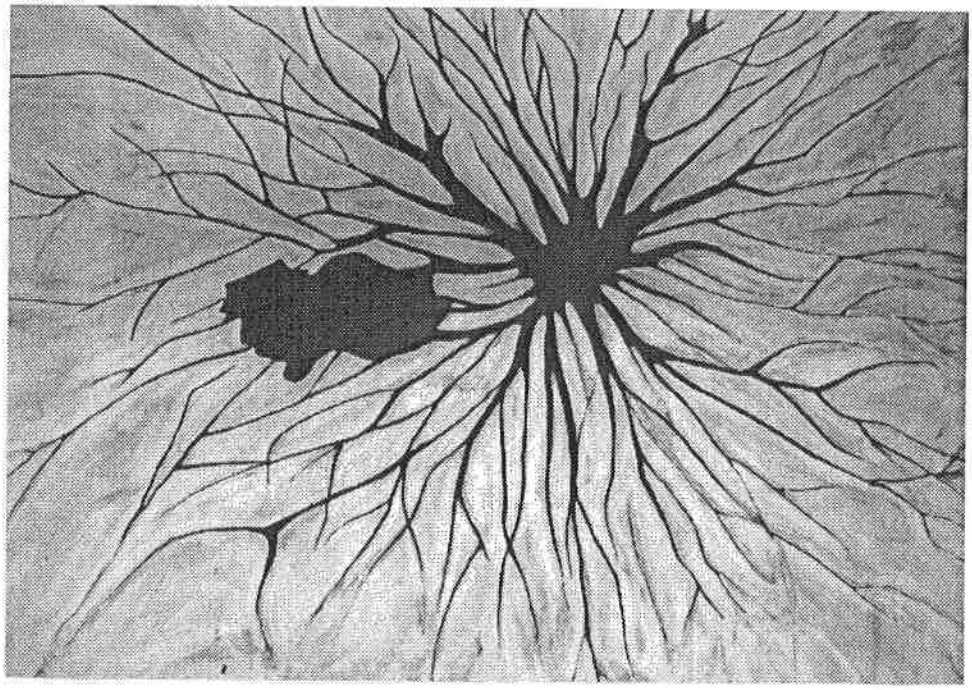
We don't need to know. The point is, the Jello-salad mix of worldbeat & punk & rock & stage-soul is a stellar combination, and any of the 150 or so cats who came to The Club that night will agree. When the bands finally started, the evening went better than well: the sound was good, there was minimal time between bands, and a good time was had by all, with the sole exception to the club owner, who revealed to me that "this wasn't his thing". More variety at The Club? I'd hope so, but I have a feeling that they're more concerned with their shrimp.

More pictures of the show and info links for all bands are on our website: fence.tsx.org

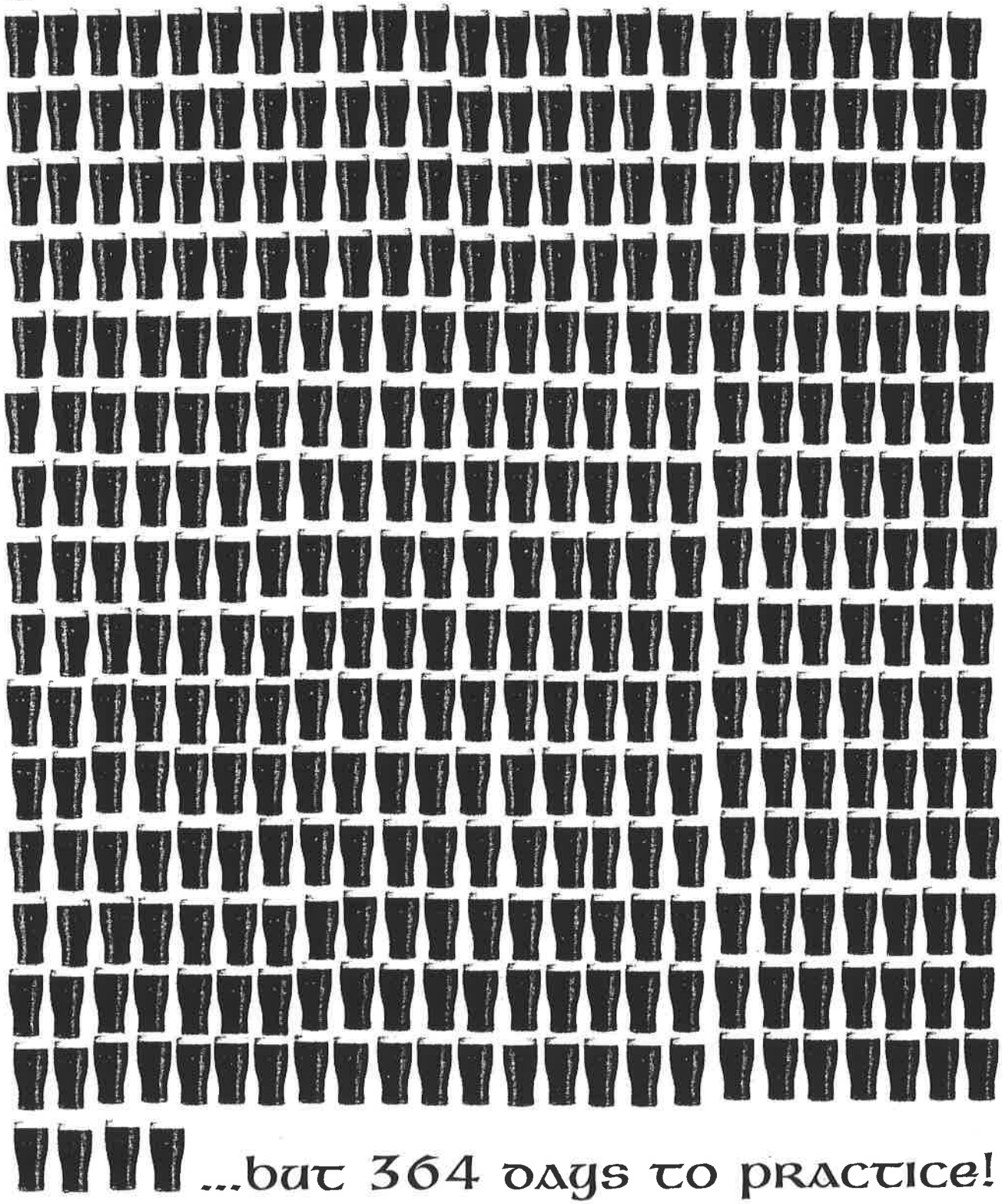
The Play's the Thing

FENCE *arts correspondent* ***Melissa Charles*** *provides a few pointers to a new exhibit by Roanoke artist Will Hunt*

Right now, at 309 First Street Restaurant in downtown Roanoke, there is an exhibition of Will Hunt's most recent artwork. Each piece in this exhibit is based on a famous play, and depicts either a scene from the play, or a symbolic representation of characters or theme. Anyone familiar with Will's work knows his usual style of layering and texture, passion in brushwork, and chaotic effect achieved through well thought out compositions. In this series, however, he has taken a much more minimalist approach to his work. These paintings are obviously narrative pieces, but the narrative is no so obvious. The artist is almost playing a game with his audience - each piece is ambiguous, and he wants the viewer to guess the play. The titles of the paintings give clues as to which play, but not to the title of the play itself, and most objects are somewhat abstract, which invites further investigation. While all the pieces are extremely thought provoking, at the same they convey a mood to the viewer. Does the mood coincide with the theme of the play? How well do you know your popular plays? Besides the mystery theater subject matter, Will has also managed to create a series of paintings that look fabulous together. Even if you can't figure out the narrative, you can appreciate this collection. Each piece reveals several layers in paint, a detail that shouldn't be overlooked. The way that these sometimes subtle areas in each piece are strategically revealed adds the effect of three-dimensionality. Go look at them, study them. Can you figure out the play? Do you understand why the artist revealed layers in those areas? Which one is your favorite? Can you recognize the symbolism in each piece?



There's only one St. Patrick's Day...



...but 364 days to practice!

only at

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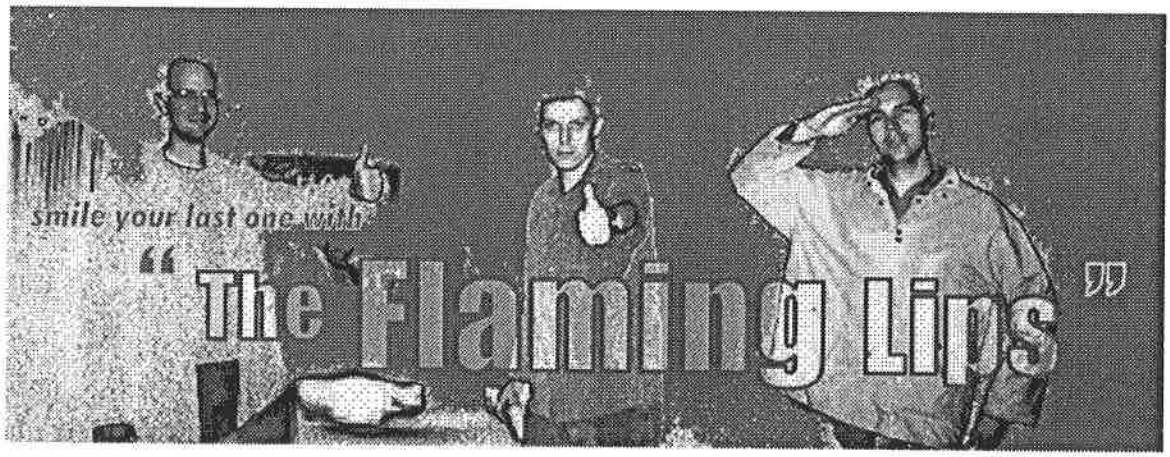
It's true – Punk's not dead, and Rock 'n' Roll will never die. The fabulous, filthy cycle of destruction and renewal, the past and the future – they're all here in Vince Eruptum's Best & Worst of '99

Dead or Alive?

Watta year!!! Pop music couldn't be less interesting, and yet, strangely enticing. Kind of like returning to a job you hated. Despite the shame of taking the job back, and the drudgery of the work, you can't help but feel a little comfort in all your old routines, shortcuts and smoke-breaks that seem like second nature now. Which kind of begs the question, how did we get here? Who put us back on the schedule? We were supposed to be on the sub-list!



1999 began the full-on, no-foolin' return of mainstream pop. A new crop of teen pop divas momentarily diverts the attention of middle-aged men from www.teenpussy.com, and forces them to have uncomfortable conversations with their wives. Boy bands are back, finding a surprisingly hungry audience. Mainstream rap (with the exception of Lauryn Hill) continues to produce nothing of substance, while the Roots, whose "Things Fall Apart" is near genius, have to consider second jobs. Lenny Kravitz cuts his hair, covers a classic-rock dud, wins a fashion award, and goes from dull to obnoxious in 3 easy steps! Elton John won't go away, and still seems to be constantly on the verge of tears about something (Diana?). Korn and Limp Bizkit race neck and neck for The Award For Band With The Least Sense Of Humor. Kid Rock reintroduces booze into the after-show party. Remember booze? Blondie's back – nope, there they go again, Blondie's gone. The Goo Goo Dolls show us that Paul Westerberg can write hit singles, he just needed a makeover. Jennifer Lopez proves that she's more than a piece of ass – wait, what the hell am I talking about? Mariah Carey pirates the SAME Tom Tom Club song two times in a row, while Puff Daddy teaches her that there's a whole world of music out there to rip off. And Latin music! Wow! A genuine Latin music explosion gives overdue chart success to a thriving yet marginalized music. Ricky Martin makes middle-class suburbia feel that they have multicultural taste, Enrique Iglesias pouts his way through one song fifteen times, and Santana suddenly seems relevant. So when are we gonna see the Carson Daly interview with Buena Vista Social Club on TRL?

Nevertheless, in spite of the cultural vacuum cleaners on recent Billboard charts, some musicians have risen to the top, earning places in Vince Eruptum's Best Of '99 list. Most of these entries, for better or worse, fell way under the radar of the mainstream. And what good is a "best of" without a "worst of"? So here goes...

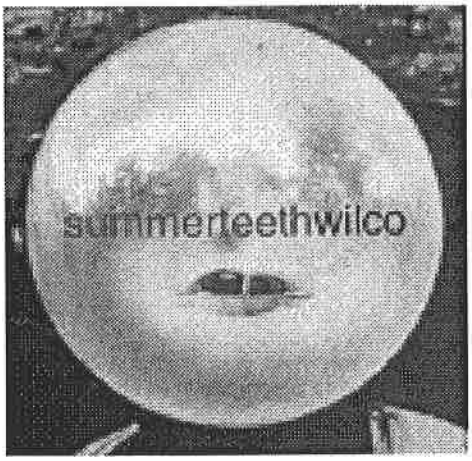
The Best

FLAMING LIPS *Soft Bulletin* (WB)

Flaming Lips once again outdo themselves with the *Soft Bulletin*, an articulately designed masterpiece. With a fully realized concept of chilly dislocation and microscopic imagery, we finally have an American *OK Computer*. It's a record with a brilliantly conceived aesthetic, served well by two years of studio attention and synchronous audio experiments ("Zaireeka"). Colorful soundscapes shift and swell, ambient instrumental passages evolve into distant, lilting choruses, drawing web-like images of scientists, insects, biology, infirmity, loneliness, psychology and a subconscious, languid sense of hope and simple joy. A very cerebral concept album tingling with the fuzzy textures of a frayed nervous system. This is music from deep inside the brain. Hands down the best record released in 1999.

WILCO *Summer Teeth* (WB)

Wilco redefine the boundaries of Americana with *Summer Teeth*, their second masterpiece and only their third album (I hate to throw the word "masterpiece" out twice, but rarely has an album been so deserving). While their progeny are still trying to catch up with the Gram Parsonisms of Wilco's Uncle Tupelo heritage, Jeff Tweedy and crew bound forward, sending all the Whiskeytowns of the world back to the drawing board. Every song is rich in poetic imagery, complicated melody, and masterful playing. They show a new fondness for vintage analog synths, such as mellotron and chamberlin, to great effect ("Nothing's Ever Gonna Stand In My Way Again"). And the record has a haunting and melancholy emotional depth ("She's A Jar", "Shot In The Arm") rarely heard in pop music anymore. With *Summer Teeth*, Tweedy puts himself in line with Paul Westerberg, Neil Young, and Tom Waits as one of America's greatest underappreciated songwriters.



Wilco: Redefining the boundaries of Americana

GET BACK/AKARMA REISSUES

Coming out of nowhere, this mysterious pair of sister record labels in Italy has unleashed one of the most jaw-dropping series of vinyl reissues, making available in reprint records once reserved for the glass case behind the counter in Manhattan record shops. Their catalog is heavy on the ultra-obscure vintage psychedelia – records by bands that only the most hardcore psych fans have even heard of, printed in tiny private runs and fetching $500 at record shows, are miraculously back in print! Stuff like the Deviants, John's Children (with Marc Bolan, kids!), The Artwoods, Creation, and Nirvana (the original 60s psych Nirvana), plus hands-down rock classics (and must-haves on vinyl) like Big Star's *#1 Record* and the Small Faces' *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake*. Get Back has also recently branched into vintage punk essentials like Pere Ubu, Iggy Pop, New York Dolls and the Adverts, as well as avant-garde jazz staples Sun Ra and Albert Ayler. The legality of it is somewhat dubious, and the prices ain't cheap, but you can finally stop squinting at Goldmine classifieds for your vinyl copy of Blue Cheer's *Outside Inside*. Or better yet, get the PICTURE DISC version!
RECOMMENDED: Big Star's *#1 Record*; The Stooges' *Rubber Legs*; The Boys' *The Boys*.

The Worst

There were some real easy targets last year. In the interests of journalism and fairness, I have decided to leave out some of the more obvious selections. Boy bands are just too easy to criticize. And more specifically, Kid Rock, Limp Bizkit and Korn have not been given their just place on this list in the hope that if we ignore them, they will go away. They get way too much press as it is, they don't need my negative review do bolster their "bad boy" reputations.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
World Wrestling Federation: WWF The Music Volume 3 (Koch)

I will never be one to look down my nose at professional wrestling. I have not-too-distant memories of getting a quickened pulse when Andre The Giant held Rowdy Roddy Piper above his head like a trophy. But this new batch of wrasslin' heroes – I dunno, it's just not the same. Not to sound like a codgy ol' coot, it's just not as much fun. It's less comic book superhero flash, and more aggression and violence. Genuine hatred and self-loathing seems a little close to the surface for the enthusiasts. It's not unlike the state of pop music in the 80s versus 90s – the wild boy party music of Motley Crue and Poison has given way to the bigoted angst of Limp Bizkit and Korn. Proving that record sales are generated by marketing and hype (as if we needed further proof), *Various Artists: World Wrestling Federation: WWF The Music Volume 3* spent a dozen or so weeks on the chart, taking up a space that could have been better used by actual records. For those not familiar, this is only one installment in a series of 'albums' consisting of 14 theme songs for 14 wrestlers. Basically, they've taken the 15-second fanfare that various wrestlers use for their procession to the ring, and have stretched them out to full song length. Brilliant. It's depressing to watch unhappy kids waste their money on this crap. In one sense, it's understandable – it comes in handy when you're playing with the action figures. But anyone over the age of 12 in ownership of this 'album' should be institutionalized. Just for kicks, here's the endorsement given by The Road Dogg Jesse James on the Amazon website: "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, the WWF proudly presents the best wrestling music in the world, WWF the music volume 3! And if you're not down with that, I have two words for you!! S*ck it!!" (For further reading, I suggest the full text of customer reviews on the Amazon site. It'll have you rolling. And

STARS AND BLAHS

FRANK BLACK
S/T and *Pistolero* (Spin Art)

He's well past his prime, and his once massive fan-base of radical Pixies lunatics has dwindled to a cult of hardcore true believers, but Frank Black is making the best music of his career. He released two albums of loose, raucous rock'n'roll (recorded live in the studio to two-track) within 6 months of each other. His songs are fresh, off-the-cuff bursts of pure energy that betray a well-versed knowledge of musical history. Nobody has been this productive, and as consistently good, past their career's prime since Neil Young. RECOMMENDED: *Pistolero*.

TAJ MAHAL AND TOUMANI DIABATE
Kulanjan (Hannibal)

One revered American blues artist and seven West African kora musicians converge in Georgia to record, or really more to experiment with, a hybrid of traditional music from different cultures. In the process, they create something that dazzles and surprises everyone involved. This record is little more than a jam session, but it is much more than a mere east-meets-west contrast of cultures. Taj does not import the music of Mali to color his own compositions for novelty effect as on, say, a Peter Gabriel record. Instead they blend their styles to reveal just how similar traditional folk music is between Africa and the rural South. Taj and Toumani begin with an intense respect for each other's musical heritage, and before they know it, their enthusiasm inspires them to create a new form of music. The performance is subtle, textured, and sensitive, steeped in Malian history and Southern soul. You've never heard anything like it, nor have they.

CHEAP TRICK with GUIDED BY VOICES, Sep. 10, 9:30 Club, D.C.

Two of rock'n'roll's greatest purists (and greatest anthem writers) descend upon an unsuspecting 9:30 Club audience to remind everyone just how delicious - and necessary - a fist-raising chorus is. If you've forgotten, go sell your Belle and Sebastian albums and buy *Heaven Tonight*. Very few people left this show without ringing ears, a Rick Nielsen pick in their pocket, and beer in their hair. Ahhhh...
HIGHLIGHT: GBV frontman Bob Pollard scurries on stage to join Cheap Trick on "Southern Girls", guzzling Jack Daniels between verses.

VH1

The former white-bread music video channel once reserved for aging preppies gettin' their groove on to Mariah Carey has experienced one of the most radical (and successful) changes in programming, perhaps to balance MTV's endless plummet into the pit of cotton candy hell. Fully reformed as an entertainment documentary network, they've taken A&E's "Biography" formula to a new level with programs like the devilishly voyeuristic "Behind The Music" and "Before They Were Rock Stars". VH1 has become pop music's archive librarian, with the attitude of a back-row heckler at a high-school talent show. Not content to just poke fun at rock's less fortunate, they take time to honor heroes ("VH1 Legends") and teach their version of history ("100 Greatest Women Of Rock", "History Of Rock And Roll"), all through the words of the musicians themselves. Plus, there's a lot to learn about the human condition from C. C. Deville.

THE ELEPHANT 6 COLLECTIVE

Apples In Stereo, Olivia Tremor Control, Elf Power and several others released records this year that revive the wild, experimental aesthetic of 60s psychedelia. Swirling vocal harmonies, colorful vintage keyboards, and cartoony album covers, and a seething obsession with Brian Wilson combine to remind us why the Pretty Things and Syd's Pink Floyd were so brilliant in the first place. Yet despite the antique influences, it always sounds new and innovative, thanks to their insistence on primitive home recording devices. They often swap band members, and share the same studio (called, not so

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by the way, this CD received an average of 5 stars from 203 reviews. They're out there, folks.)

CHRIS GAINES *Garth Brooks In... The Life Of Chris Gaines* (Capitol)

My venom for this CD has waned, since it was such a flop (phew!). But man, I kinda got my panties wadded up about it, huh? Hee hee! Oh, and I know I've already named this Album Of The Year, 1999, but it seems Mr. Gaines was disqualified on a technicality. Apparently, my ultimately favorable review had to do with a sexual identity crisis of my own, unrelated to the quality of the recording. So alas, the album is a piece of shit, no matter how you analyze it. Next move for Mr. Brooks: "Guillermo Brooks - The Latin Sessions, Featuring Rob Thomas". But, in the interest of fairness, here is an endorsement, once again from a music fan in the pages of Amazon: "OK so I'm still a little confused, I thought I ordered a Garth CD, got it. The jacket cover did not look like Garth, style a little different than Garth. Unique, yes, Wonderful, yes, I love it! By far the best misunderstanding I have ever had, which makes Chris Gaines my great adventure of love." - Dottie S.

SAMMY HAGAR
Red Voodoo (MCA)

One of the most unwelcome comebacks of an over-the-hill never-was. His new album, *Red Voodoo* is just a big ad for his Mexican resort, Cabo Wabo. The single "Mas Tequila", grand larceny of Gary Glitter's "Rock And Roll Part 2", is designed to get the crowds drinkin' on slow nights. And the whole thing has the feel of that guy in high-school who always acted cool and superior to you while he dated the cheerleader, until he gets dumped and then tries to be all chummy. Diamond Dave never looked so good. Once again, Amazon: "I was at a tailgate party and someone was playing this CD. I didn't realize Sammy had a new one out, but let me say, this CD ROCKS HARD!!! What a great return of the Red Rocker! I was so impressed with the music & lyrics that I bought it right away and haven't stopped listening since!! Buy this CD, it's excellent." - A music fan from San Francisco.

RADIOHEAD
OK Computer (Parlophone)

I know, it came out like 15 years ago, but this fucking record is still topping everyone's Best Album In The History Of Recorded Music lists. I actually like it quite a bit, but there needs to be balance in the universe. So I'll take the bold step of putting it on my Worst Of list. Nya.

STARS AND BLAHS

coincidentally, Pet Sounds Studio), which not only unifies the sounds of the bands, but fuels their prolific imaginations. It can get rather high-browed at times, perhaps too much for it's own good, but it is always delivered with the lightest of hearts. RECOMMENDED: Elf Power's *A Dream In Sound*; Beulah's *When Your Heartstrings Break.*

POP MUSIC

The greatest thing to happen to music in the late 90s is the return of pop music: pure, unabashed, bubblegum Top 40 pop. "Alternative" is gone, Grunge is a dated memory, Third-wave Ska and the swing revival flitted away, and indie-rock never even hit the map of the mainstream, dying a slow and lonely death in the used 7" bin. So why does Your Faithful Rock Critic herald this dumbing down of popular culture? Allow me to explain. We are currently brewing another punk rock explosion of undetermined origin. The stars are all lining up, the climate is ripe for another burst of fed-up, angry, Do-It-Yourself rock and roll. As of this writing, there are only eight guitar-based bands in Billboard's Top 40. And of those, three consider themselves hip-hop as much as anything else (Limp Bizkit, Korn, Kid Rock), and one is a freakin' symphonic album (Metallica). That leaves four – Blink 182, Creed, Rage Against The Machine and Smash Mouth. Is this a fertile culture of daring new American music? Well, the charts never represented that end of the spectrum, but the same charts of ten years ago were surprisingly better balanced. The Billboard Top 40 of January 1990 featured no less than fourteen rock bands, and these were the vapid, dark days of 80s pop hangover that bred Nirvana's room-clearing explosion. So don't put flowers on rock music's grave just yet. This isn't a new scenario, it happens every dozen years or so. Kids get sick of being force fed an endless procession of squeaky-clean, featherweight pop stars, they buy cheap guitars, write their own songs, and start a revolution in music. The Beatles in 1964. Punk rock in 1977. Indie-rock and grunge in 1991. In fact, the overwhelming dominance of pop is absolutely essential to the creation of a quality movement in music. The Clash and The Ramones would never have happened without Peter Frampton and The Eagles to disgust them (plus a bitter distrust of the government, but that's a different column). The Beatles and Stones wouldn't have sounded so refreshing without pantywaist snooze-fests like Pat Boone and Andy Williams. So we've got something exciting to look forward to, though it's not quite clear what yet (a prediction: bored with electronica, fueled with punk energy, and sentimental for Atari, a New Wave/Glam revival will introduce vintage synths and unashamed Duran Duran admiration to pop). Though in the meantime, it's gonna get worse before it gets better. Christina Aguilera will probably be invited to sing at the White House, and Ricky Martin is, in fact, the new Elvis. But it's all OK, because in the next two years, something will come along to sweep the lot of them away. So next time you see Britney Spears accept an American Music Award, or some dorky looking guys turning their heads from side to side in unison, don't get mad, get even. Start a punk band. Everyone go buy a guitar and start a fucking punk rock band. Right now.

Honorable Mentions

VELVET CRUSH *Free Expression* (Bobsled)	**MERCURY REV** *Deserter's Songs* (V2)	**MATTHEW SWEET** *In Reverse* (Volcano)
BUILT TO SPILL *Keep It Like A Secret* (WEA)	**BILLY BRAGG & WILCO** *Mermaid Ave.* (WEA)	**PAVEMENT** *Terror Twilight* (Matador)

MODERN ROCK RADIO

When "Alternative" died as a marketing genre a couple years ago, radio programmers of alternative stations scrambled to come up with an excuse for themselves. What they came up with is something called "Modern Rock". In an industry that prides itself on rigid classifications, this is one of the most transparent and ill-conceived ideas they've ever had. "Modern Rock" has no definition. In some markets, and especially in college radio, that lack of definition equals musical freedom, that is, an open format enables music directors and educated DJs to promote music across genres that otherwise wouldn't be heard. College and public radio can be a beautiful thing – an outlet for new, adventurous music. Of course, these stations are publicly funded and don't have to deal with advertisers' expectations, but that's no excuse for the commercial stations. Fence has to deal with advertisers, but that doesn't encourage it's editors to self-censor, walking on eggshells around sensitive ideas or issues. Perhaps my expectations of these delusional used-car salesmen in the boardroom are too high. They're trying to run a business after all. But our beloved Z-101, which dresses itself up as the "Modern Rock" alternative, is just another version of top 40, WROV in disguise. The programming provides nothing unique, nothing that hasn't proven itself elsewhere. Blink 182, Creed and Orgy may in fact be "modern", but are alternative to nothing. New music can only find it's way into rotation on this station once the album hits the Billboard 100. You will never, as promised, "hear it first" on Z-101 (with the exception of saving grace Tori Mazur's nifty "Global Warming" program on Sunday nights*). At least for stations that cling to the deceased "Alternative" tag, such as WHFS in Washington, DC, new music of genuine quality with a cult-following can occasionally pop up it's head – remember when you could hear Pavement and Jon Spencer Blues Explosion on the radio? But the taste of the simpletons behind the control board at our beloved Z-101 seems to lean towards the dark, aggressive, directionless rap/rock that is so in fashion among the under-18s at the moment There's little hope for this doomed genre called "Modern Rock". It is uneducated, ignorant and so offensively low-brow as to ensure that it will never attract someone who could possibly improve it.

You will never, as promised, "hear it first" on Z-101

*Z-101 has, as you might expect, dropped Tori's "Global Warming" show from its schedule. But the queen of the airwaves can now be heard on-line at Audio Ether. Check the Fence website (fence.tsx.org) for a link.

Logical Fallacy

By Doug Cheatwood

I'm walking down the hall. Tap tap tap. Those are my blue and green Airwalks. Harry said they are dilapidated. "Get new shoes," said Harry. There are holes in these. In the hall, the sunshine is bright. It's the middle of the morning coming through the glass. Cold sunshine. Tap tap tap. Past the table. Now I'm on the stairs.

Mister Barringer told me to leave class because I am a distraction. I distract from what the other students need to learn, which means I am a distraction and that's what Mister Barringer told me. So I believed him and I left and I'm out of class early. It's half past ten and I'm walking across the parking lot to the bus stop. The bus is coming in half an hour. Harry will be mad because I got kicked out of class again. Harry will definitely be mad. I'll go wait for the bus.

I'm tying my shoes again and I'm in the dirty glass booth to keep the rain out, but it's not raining – it's sunny. I'm tying my other Airwalk, or Airwalk shoe, and I'm talking to the black lady. She's black like a brown Hershey bar, so really she's brown, but it's a really dark brown, so I guess people thought it would be easier to say that she is black, but each color is one syllable so I don't see how one is easier to say than the other. I am suppose to be white, but really I am pink with orange freckles. Or brown freckles. Sometimes I am red when I have acne, and that makes Harry mad too. When I pop them.

I am finished tying both shoes and I tap my foot repeatedly and the black lady is looking at me with her forehead all wrinkled like bed sheets in the morning. I am talking.

"But you really *are* brown, right? Really you are brown. Really I am pink. Hey, guess what? I got kicked out of class today. He said I needed to stop being a distraction, so I said I was going to stop for a while and then he kicked me out, and I believe he hates me or doesn't like me...no, I believe I was being a distraction, but I believe both things really, and Harry is going to be so mad. Do you know Harry?"

The black lady's face is all scrunched up like that other black lady's face was when I threw the sandwich. I scoot over across the cold bench to look at her face closer because the sun is rippling down the lines and ridges and the shadows really do look black when the sun is passing, but the sun has passed and now it's dark again or just darker or the sun went behind a cloud or something. I talk some more.

"By the way, my name is Donovan. What is your name? Rosa Parks was a black lady who rode a bus like you will in a little while and we can ride it together. We can sit in the front if you want, because now there are civil rights, and we are civilized and we can talk like civilized people because we have civil rights and it sure is a pretty day."

I stop and watch a flock of birds coming off a tree across the street and they move like they have one brain and Harry said I would get diseases if I touched one and Mister Barringer said their bones are hollow. Or their wing bones. Which reminds me of when I had fried chicken at the grocery store yesterday. Chicken can't fly but it was greasy and I ate it. A breast and a wing. I talk to the black lady.

"Do you like fried chicken? Harry says that black people like fried chicken. But you are brown, but since they say you are black I thought you might like fried chicken, but they say I am white and I like fried chicken anyway, but just because black people like fried chicken it doesn't mean that white people don't because that is called a logical fallacy. And another logical fallacy is that just because some or lots of black people like fried chicken doesn't mean that all black people like fried chicken because that is a logical fallacy too, and that is called a stereotype too, and once I got beat up because I thought about stereotypes. Stereotypes are bad because everyone is unique even though black people have better rhythm and play basketball like in the movie better than white people. But that's a stereotype, right? I don't know, what do you think? By the way, Harry has a new stereo that plays loud in his room and they want to evict him so they told him to be quiet or they would, and I bled out of my nose for so long until they found me. But they weren't black except for one and another was white but the rest were Hispanic, and when you fill out the test for the census I check white because I am, but you are black so you check the other and the Hispanic people check the Hispanic box, but some people are mulattos." Next I get very close and confide, "That comes from interracial love."

The black lady's face had gotten more wrinkled and her mouth is spread out and shut tight and she is shaking and suddenly she starts laughing really hard. She is laughing and laughing and laughing and I laugh too, because she is. And we laugh until the bus comes. Then the bus comes and we get up and get on the bus.

We pay and sit in the front.

"Zeal is its own Excuse"

Lt. Nevada, Space Marine Chaplain

WARHAMMER 40,000

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REVIEWS

Another look at the best of 1999 by **J. Marinelli** (a.k.a. "Hillbilly Jeff"), the 3845th coolest guy in Morgantown, WV and vocalist/songwriter for The Brailledrivers.

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy
Billy Bragg
Todd Burge
The Creation
Freakwater
Fugazi
Golden
Guitar Wolf
Let's Crash
Mancake
Marmoset
Miss Lonelyheart
Mercury Pusher
Motorhead
Naked Raygun
Pavement
Pearl Schwartz
Rob The Bank
Shoutbus
Stompwater
Viva Caramel
The Wedding Present

Viva Caramel
Hooray For Candy
(City Of Romance)

At last! Cleveland's fabbest four proudly grace The Trimdon Grange World Headquarters with its first recorded document. And what a document it is! These two songs ("Bits and Pieces" and "Doubting Thomas") are both well-constructed post-rock brain-burners that will leave you with tears in your eyes (and not just because your own band will never be this good), a buzz in your eardrums, and a big ol' size-14 boot mark on your little white rump. "Bits And Pieces" is a dino-sized power-waltz, with a hook that would make Bob Mould jealous. "Doubting Thomas" treads more straight-ahead mid-tempo rock territory – one could even liken it to a surly, red-eyed, liquor-chuggin' Fugazi, complete with a wonderfully strangled vocal track. When's the LP coming out, boys?

Shoutbus
Ain't That America?
(Art Monk Construction)

Shitfire! Someone should have told me that D. "Boilerman" Boon pulled a Lazarus (read yer New Testament), paid a call to Watt and Hurley, shed a few pounds (but not too many), moved to northern Virginia and recorded this here quality slab of digital plastic. Though it may not be the most original disc in my collection (heck, they even cover "Vietnam" to a tee), what it lacks in originality is more than compensated for in terms of spastic energy, slate-hard chops and pure spirit. And the lyrics? Get lost! The Pedro-styled spiel on top of this three-ring mess is devoid of flaws. As with any Minutemen album, the lyrics are a very acute, informed, Ginsbergesque observation of our dying culture – furiously raging upon everything from suburban xenophobia to exploitative TV talk shows. Can I hear an amen !?!

Pavement
Spit On A Stranger
(Matador)

Admittedly, I haven't owned a Pavement record since Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain (and I taped that one from someone). Don't get me wrong, I've always thought that old man Malkmus was a skilled and prolific tunesmith, and have liked what I've heard since their 1991-92 heyday, but have never paid close attention to what they've done since then. Anyhow, this new Pavement single (I guess it's a teaser for the brand-new Terror Twilight LP) is pretty good. Four out of the five tracks are winners – especially the compelling "Harness Your Hopes" and "Rooftop Gambler", which could have been outtakes from Loaded (for anyone who's been hiding under a rock for the past 31 years, Loaded is the Velvet Underground's most "mature" LP). I can't detect any of the Fall/Wire fixation that made them famous (perish the thought, but did they 'outgrow' English post-punk or something?), and that's kind of a bummer – but hell, the songs are definitely there. All in all, it's cool stuff. If you're a fan, you already own it – if, like me, you let Pavement fall from your grasp when they reached the margins of commercial acceptance, you may want to get this and hear just what you've been missing – mainly to ensure you never miss anything this good again.

Mancake
Will Destroy You
(Art Monk Construction)

Jesus Tapdancing Christ, this is brilliant! The manifesto of the Breakfast Violence Movement has a new soundtrack, and I think the soundtrack is called "Yank Crime", or "My War", or something. Rumor has it that current and/or former members of Frodus, Samuel, Battery, and Wind Of Change were responsible for this batter-dipped assault on the senses. But don't quote me, I don't want these boys on my bad side! Lyrically, Mancake paint a blueberry-syrup-drenched post-apocalyptic landscape where members of a certain ultrasensitive, backpack-wielding mid-90s youth subculture are brutally bloodied, and cyberporn enthusiasts are publicly stripped and beaten with their modem connections in a carnival-like atmosphere. Buy this, you dingus!

Guitar Wolf
Jet Generation
(Matador)

As soon as the needle hits the groove, you know that Japan's Guitar Wolf aren't fucking around! Seji, Billy and Toru have absorbed the best of what America had to offer circa 75-79 (Ramones, Dead Boys, Pagans, Heartbreakers, Electric Eels, Iggy/Williamson, etc.) and have given us the rare privilege of having it spit right back up at us. Like other three-chord wonders before it, this disc offers very little variety, save for the Link Wray bump-and-grind of "Cosmic Space Girl" and "Refrigerator Zero" (both of which are bona fide classics). The rest is glorious high-speed, razorblade punk rock; delivered the way the good lord intended it – with plenty of ear-splitting feedback and analog tape hiss. As long as bands like Guitar Wolf are with us, Lock'n'Loll will never die.

MORE REVIEWS

Motorhead
Everything Louder than Everyone Else - hamburg, Germany 1998
(CMC International/BMG)

I probably don't have to tell you how much this double-live CD rips. Lemmy's been giving rock'n'roll a go since the early 70s (when he was a galactic trailblazer in the early line up of Hawkwind), and he still has it – every last dirty little bit of it. Sir Kilmister knows exactly what he's doing, and these two discs are the proof. Lemmy and Motorhead (their umpteenth line up, but still very comparable to the classic Fast Eddie Clark/"Philthy Animal" Taylor triumvirate of yesteryear) tear through some shit-hot versions of "Iron Fist", "Born To Raise Hell", "Killed By Death", "Bomber", "Stay Clean", "Overkill" and, of course, "Ace Of Spades". Everything... is a quintessential in-the-flesh document (on par with The Ramones' It's Alive, Johnny Cash's Live At Folsom Prison, The Jam's Dig the New Breed, and James Brown's Live at the Apollo) of a band I sadly never got to see live.

Marmoset
Today It's You
(Secretly Canadian)

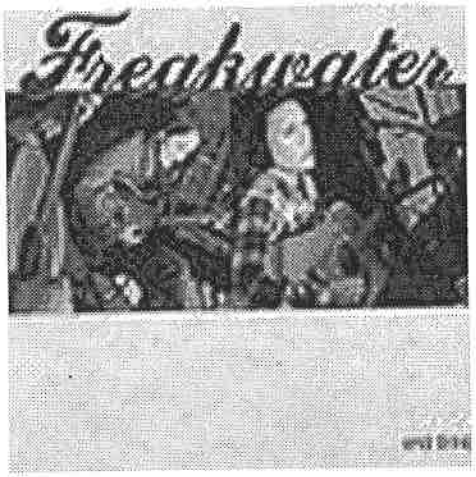
This stunning disc (Marmoset's first full-length) is brimming over with lovely, bewildering melodies that evoke the hushed psychosis and arched pop cynicism of Wire's intrepid Chairs Missing LP. The sparse, cautious interplay displayed by this Indianapolis-based quartet is almost sexual – cold, breathy guitars fall in and out of file with carefully punctuated bubbles of bass and drum kit – popping into oblivion as they float through a desperate, smog-filled south London sky. The singer sounds alternately Anglo-bored ("Forever We Ignite", "The Lovers", "Heavy Breathing On The Telephone") and boyishly curious ("Blooms", "Raincoats In Sea"). All in all, Today It's You, is a sad, majestic album, and its creators may be the best new band I've heard in a year.

Freakwater
End Time
(Thrill Jockey)

It seems that after several years (and almost as many magnificent LPs), Louisville, Kentucky's Freakwater have decided that a change from their simple, folk-oriented delivery is in order. For this year's apocalyptically titled End Time they've added drums, Hammond organ, electric guitars and (get this) an entire string section to augment Janet Bean and Catherine Irwin's smoky folktales of fear and loathing in southern Appalachia. I'll be goddamned – it works beautifully! If you listen to all their LPs in chronological order, you can trace the history of country music from The Carter Family and Woody Guthrie on through Hank Williams to Gram Parsons or Emmylou Harris. The sophisticated arrangements are perfectly complemented by Irwin and Bean's frighteningly true-to-life musings, which have gotten even more complex and accurate since 1997's more optimistically titled Springtime. Listening to End Time would lead one to believe that it is both a reaction to and a continuation of the music and ideas in their last release. The contrast is very apparent: Springtime was a far more innocent and rural record in every sense. Its title implied new hope and rebirth. Instrumentally, Springtime relied mainly on Irwin and Bean's acoustic guitars, David Gay's stand-up bass, and any of the various folk instruments virtuoso Max Johnston could get his hands on – and its lyrics, however dark, were comparatively brighter. End Time, in every sense, is much more mature and urban – and the lyrics are strikingly heart wrenching. As the songs roll on, it seems that End Time is one big hillbilly doom-fest, until, that is, "All Life Long" (the masterful Bean- penned final track) begins. In "All Life Long", the velvet-voiced Bean consoles a longtime companion, recalling their troubled history, sifting through the haze of smoke and whiskey to point out all the crimes against love and purity they've committed. At last she comes to the conclusion that her and her lover (despite being terrible, selfish fuck-ups) may work out their problems and, and maybe even grow old together. "All Life Long" is a perfect (and perfectly placed) song, and ends the album wonderfully. Although, I thoroughly enjoy every second of this record, I doubt that it will blaze up the charts anytime soon. It's mid-1999 and few listeners have a tolerance for anything this real – especially in today's laughable 'modern country' scene. Even for those schooled in the real thing, End Time can be a tough album to listen to (and an even tougher album to review!). Either way, country music hasn't been this musically ambitious and lyrically accurate in decades.

Fugazi
Instrument Soundtrack
(Dischord)

Only a band as mighty as Fugazi can put together an 18-song collection of home recordings that have accumulated over the past ten years – and have that collection blow away just about any other album released this year. Most of the bands in America today would give their right arm for the material that Fugazi have



shitcanned. These 18 songs comprise a soundtrack for the film Instrument, which documents the first 10 years of their incredible 'career' as one of the best and brightest rock bands on the planet. What surprises me most about Instrument is how unified and cohesive it sounds – especially for a compilation of tracks that covers a decade in their history. If I didn't know better, I'd guess that it was recorded in one long night. Each song is such a fleeting moment, and each moment quickly fades out or stops dead with a deafening, silent shudder, giving ample room for the next one. Some of the brighter moments include "I'm So Tired", a subtle, piano-driven pop gem (!), and Guy's sinister, whispered reading of "Rend It".

Billy Bragg
Reaching To The Converted
(Rhino)

Billy Bragg has always been a favorite of mine, and this cool little b-sides and outtakes collection has been a veritable godsend here in Trimdon Grange World Headquarters! Although everything on this disc is great, I'm partial to the earlier (85-88) stuff – the spare Instrumentation and dry delivery of "Think Again", "Days Like These", "Scholarship Is The Enemy Of Romance", "Wishing The Days Away" and the majestic cover of The Beatles' "She's Leaving Home" won me over on the first listen, and the others soon followed. As soon as this CD ended, I needed an encore performance, so I played it again – duh! Now if you'll pardon me, I need to dust off my copies of Life's a Riot With Spy vs. Spy and Talking To The Taxman About Poetry.

The Wedding Present
The Singles 1989-1991
(Manifesto)

This is the third time I've tried to review this two-disc monster, and every attempt has come off sounding like some bad TV advertisement. So fuck it – I give up. The Wedding Present have

STILL MORE REVIEWS

been the soundtrack to my pathetic life for about nine years now (and perhaps the best cover band since Sonic Youth – they tackle Lonnie Donnegan, The Jean-Paul Sartre Experience, Penetration, Tom Jones and Pavement here, among others). I bought this the day it came out and have been listening to it every day since. This is great. Period.

Bonny "Prince" Billy
I See A Darkness
(Palace)

This is the loosest, most organic work that Will Oldham has done since the Palace Brothers' heyday of 1994. Sorta sounds like he got together with a few buddies on a rainy evening over a 12-pack of cheap domestic beer, some weed, eight little tracks, and gave birth to 11 beautiful songs about love, death and life as a millennial troubadour. Lovely.

Rob The Bank
Spinout
b/w ***The End OF Time Is Starting Now***
7" (Ambergris)

Viva Dayton!! Spinout and The End Of Time Is Starting Now are both very energetic, up-tempo punk rock barn-burners with great female vocals *a la* Exene Cervenka. Spinout (a creative collaboration between Mitch Mitchell and Nate Farley, former and current Guided By Voices axemen, respectively) just burns with smart, immediate energy, and The End Of Time Is Starting Now is a full-on roller coaster ride to the pawnshop-ridden streets of Dayton via late 70s LA punk bohemia.

Let's Crash
3-Song 7"
(Ambergris)

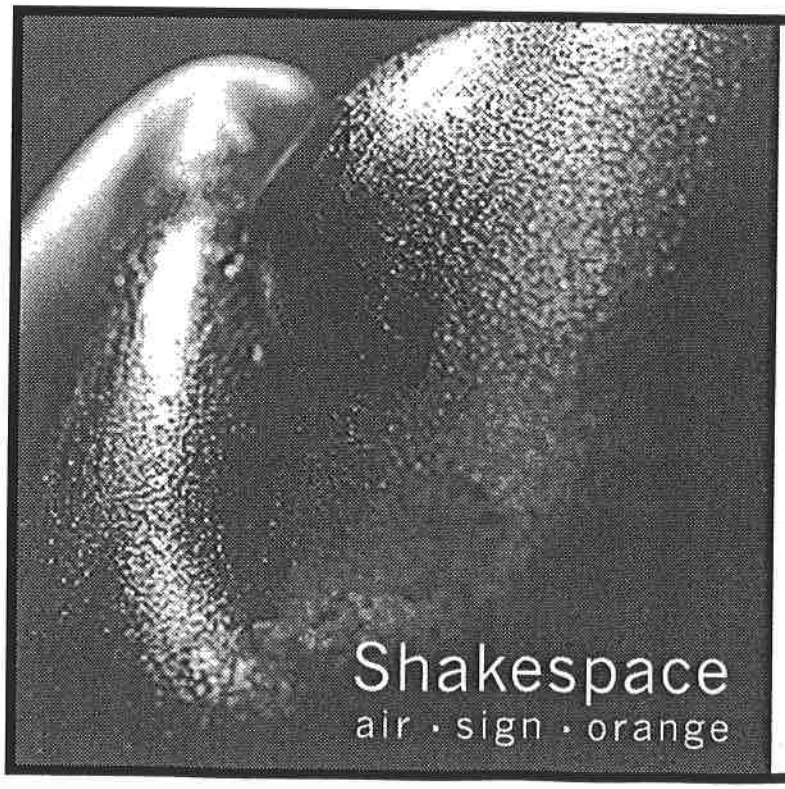
Let's Crash is a rhythmically inclined melodic/noisy powerhouse of sheer volume – with a very snotty Iggyish lead singer to boot! Granted, they have their angular, single-coil demonomania and off-kilter power drumming, but these attributes don't keep them from being a full-on rock band – hell, the record's strongest song ("Get In The Bushes") has some great handclaps buried beneath the wall of guitars and monstrous 16th note snare fills. Bad-ass rocknroll aside, this record's two most important assets could very well be (1) the hot, live sound that pours itself out of your stereo speakers, and (2) the fact that the music these boys play (and the way in which they play it) just drips with confidence and pure attitude (see the earlier Iggy comparison), a rare and precious commodity these days. Vive la Crash!

Creation
Making Time (Singles 1966-1968)
(Sin-Drome)

Ahh! Another singles compilation from the hottest 60s Mod/Psych band ever. Just about as good as the How Does It Feel To Feel, and more complete than Our Music Is Red With Purple Flashes collections, this disc has a few obscure tracks and outtakes not found on any other Creation LPs, including the very raw, very punk live version of "Making Time" – their send-up of "I'm A Man" (sure it's a cover of a cover, but it makes the Yardbirds sound like the Partridge Family!) – and the Velvets-raw "Instrumental #1". Very suave indeed.

Naked Raygun
Basement Screams
(Quarterstick)

Life is good. When I was a budding, fresh-faced NR fan back in the mid-80s, I wrote to Naked Raygun World Headquarters inquiring about the availability of their classic EP Basement Screams (I think in the letter I referred to it as "Screams From The Basement" – ahh youth!). Their manager, Karen Bemis, wrote me promptly and told me that it had been out of stock for years and that they may re-press it in the future. Twelve years on and I'm holding the digitized version in my hand! The future is here, kids! Class is in session! Time for lesson one! Quarterstick, in their infinite wisdom, found it necessary to re-release all of Pezzatti and co's classic discs, the first of which being this hot little number. Basement Screams (from 1983 – with eight no-fi bonus tracks including a noisy-but-faithful take on Wire's 1977 hallmark "12XU") was constructed by a younger, sloppier NR (a line up that couldn't hold a candle to the definitive Haggerty, Spicer, Kedzy model), but is



air sign orange

Shakespace

(CD on Happy Couples Never Last/Steady State)

Street date: June 30, 2000

See Shakespace at Festival in the Bar at Kara O'Caen's Irish Pub in downtown Roanoke on June 10, 2000

Shakespace's first CD and the first Ksine CD, both on No Phase Records, are still available (send $8 for each) from

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PO Box 3104, Roanoke, VA 24015

shakespace1@aol.com
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AND YET EVEN MORE REVIEWS

chockfulla brains, guts, hooks and heart nonetheless. That's not to say that BS doesn't have its share of classic Raygun tuneage – hell, I'll stake my Les Paul and Marshall half-stack on the notion that no band in our current indie/punk/rock scene will ever write a song as good as "I Lie" (or "Potential Rapist" for that matter). Fucking transcendent.

Mercury Pusher
CD-EP
(Olive)

My man Dan P. laid this on me a few weeks back, and I decided that there was no way I could wait 'til the next issue of TGE to gush about this ungodly bastard of a murk-rock opus. Gimme a tall glass of Dayton water – obviously something's in it. What else can explain what that little, nondescript town has produced in the past 15 years. Maybe my band'll be able to channel everyone from MC5 to Joy Division and still have an ironclad sense of who we are. The whole disc displays a great, sloppy, shimmering energy from start to finish, a perfect indicator of how goddamn fun their live set probably is, hint hint...

Todd Burge
Dreams Upstairs
(Bunj-Jam)

What is it? Something like Todd's 10th CD in ten years? Well, I think he's got the craft of the folk song damn near perfected. Unlike his last few recordings, Dreams Upstairs boasts an array of relatively shorter songs that are much more concise and to the point. Burge takes no more than a few minutes to make each bitterly tender statement before moving on to the next one. His voice courses and meanders through each song like the muddy Monongahela cutting through the scarred West Virginia landscape. These ten songs display the flawless lyrical observation and dead-honest attention to detail that we've come to expect from Burge. There's a darkness to most of the songs here that invokes Springsteen's classic 1983 LP, Nebraska. And, like Nebraska, a few tiny pinpoints of light serve as landmarks to guide the listener through the great sardonic mass – and that is what makes Dreams Upstairs a great release as opposed to a good one. The production (courtesy of Mark "no introduction needed" Poole) is neither bare-bones nor overdone. Each instrument (Burge's vocals, guitars and harmonica, plus Bill Sheeder's minimalist, almost Mo Tucker-ish drumming, and Kim Monday's atmospheric keyboards) sound incredibly rich and alive. Real enough to snatch out of thin air and hold in your hand, after the first few listens of Dreams Upstairs, you'll want to hold these sounds forever.

Golden
Summer
(Slowdime)

I really didn't know what to expect when I first put this one on. I had seen Golden once before, years ago in DC, and they did a set consisting entirely of extremely well-executed mid-70s ZZ Top covers, and I'd heard that they're a side project of prog-meisters Trans Am. The first rock song on this LP ("Recital – Spindac Volare") starts out with some wonderfully tense off-time prog-rock a la King Crimson, then runs headlong into Thin Lizzy territory! By the third song it becomes obvious that the listener is in for a 70s blastoid boogie rock hell-ride. Luckily, the boys manage to serve it up with enough irony and humor (the manlier-than-thou vocals are really over the top here!) to keep things interesting from start to finish. As much as I despise some of the musical indulgences of 70s rock, Golden manages to not really rectify these indulgences, but toy with them, giving their sprawling epics a very sweaty, very physical treatment that owes more to Black Flag than to Deep Purple or Emerson Lake and Palmer. Not long ago, a friend of mine mentioned that National Recording Studios (where Summer was recorded) resides in a huge, high-ceilinged building. Judging from the sound of the instruments, especially the gargantuan drums, it comes as no surprise that the reverb I'm hearing right now is courtesy of Mother Nature, and not some knob-twiddlin' geek behind a soundbooth. Prog-rock, 'pretentious' or otherwise – at the end of the day, Summer is a fantastic piece of work. I'd recommend it to anyone and everyone who appreciates muscular musicianship and ironic lyrical/vocal delivery, including those (like myself) who are dedicated to the three-chord, two-minute pop form.

Stompwater
4-song 7"
(Black Lung)

This is punk rock in its gloriously purest and basest form. It's the fastest, loudest, angriest thing I've heard in ages. The festering boil of rage that calls itself Stompwater is bound to scare off most listeners - even those who claim to embrace all that is aggro. Judging from the sound of things, I'm sure these good ol' boys could give two wet Schlitz farts about what I think (or what anyone else thinks for that matter). But I'll have to indulge them. Bravo, fellas.

Pearl Schwartz
4 Juvenile Delinquents 7"
(Black Lung)

4 juvenile delinquents (one member each from Guitar Wolf, 5678s, The Jet Boys, and The Devil Dogs), 3 rough and tumble 77-style punk gems on 2 sides of slick white plastic equals what might be my favorite single of 99, and probably the most overtly 'pop' record that our hillbilly neighbors at Black Lung Records have released to date. The magnetic sing-along choruses, perfect Ramones hooks, hyperkinetic spazmo drumming and joyfully trashy boy/girl vocals make this the perfect soundtrack for a furious make-out session with the partner of your choice. Pucker up!

Miss Lonelyheart
Geography
(Molecular Laboratories)

The J Robbins-produced Geography boasts ten wondrous, tightly wound anthems from what may be the most incandescent band from the cultural vacuum of South Central PA. Thirty seconds into this disc I was tapping my toes and humming along to their start-stop tightness and strong, resonant melodies. A minute and a half later they became my new favorite band. The paring of Robbins and the Lonelyhearts is a marriage made in heaven. Andy, Dan, Jay and Mike have wisely spent a good portion of their twenties studying his discography (from Burning Airlines to Jawbox to Rollcicker Laydown to Government Issue), and have filtered Robbins' unmistakable Beltway guitar smog through their own sub-rural Pennsylvanian experience. Add the works of their favorite Bobs (Mould and Pollard) to this proud pile of influences, toss in a dash of Superchunk and Mission Of Burma/Moving Targets, and you may be on to something. Geography is hard evidence that Miss Lonelyheart have given what kids everywhere knew as 'emo' and 'indie' new fuel for the burning. Press play and ride the fiery breeze. – *JMM*

INTERNATIONAL ETIQUETTE

The acquired skill known as Trouser Semaphore is swiftly gaining currency as the only way for people of quality to communicate in an age of rapidly escalating background noise levels. Typically, at the race track or at unexpectedly rumbustious parties, attempts to make oneself heard above the general hubbub can prove exasperating and, as often as not, utterly futile. Within the space of a week, and with a minimal amount of application, it is possible to gain a skill of incalculable worth. Across the floor of a crowded cocktail gathering, you too would be able to convey your innermost thoughts and deepest needs to like-minded individuals, using nothing more than the flexibility of one's physique and the rough pliability of one's trouser cloth. Surely, there is no sight more moving than a man and three square yards of carefully tailored cavalry twill moving in perfect harmony. After years of practice and much patience, the carefully orchestrated movements can transcend mere practicality and approach a level bordering on art. But no matter to which level you yourself wish to pursue the practice of Trouser Semaphore, on a day-to-day practical level, you will find it an invaluable communication aid for use socially, in business and for pleasure.

The Lost Art of

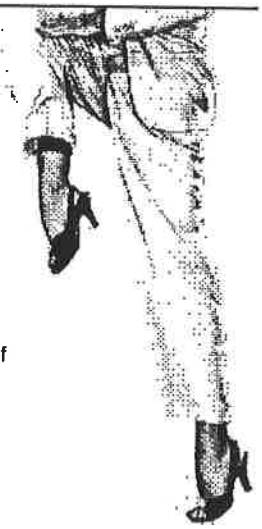
Trouser Semaphore

***By, you guessed it, that famous English nutter,* Colonel Blimp**

Having practised for some time, it is perfectly possible to adapt Trouser Semaphore to meet individual needs. Not only does personal style come into the equation but inveterate practitioners often add as many as 20 to 30 unique moves to their repertoire in order to convey information in "short-leg". A great deal of physical exertion and unpleasant bending may be bypassed in this way. On these pages are some notable examples of this individual approach.

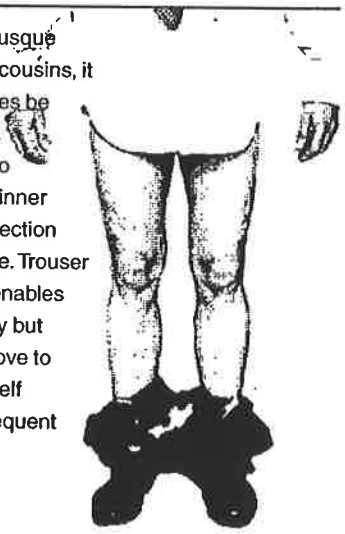
The Gaelic

The 15th Earl of Camardenshire's 'theatrical' temperament has led him towards an ill-judged appreciation of traditional Irish dancing, in which troupes of sturdy-legged colleens wantonly turn the art of Trouser Semaphore into a bare-limbed fiasco.



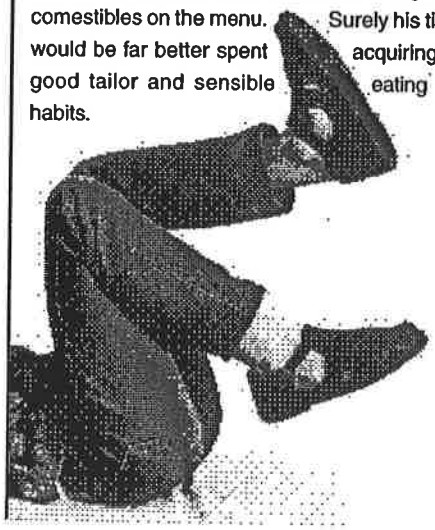
The Suitor

Unlike our brusque transatlantic cousins, it can sometimes be difficult for an Englishman to elucidate his inner feelings of affection and bonhomie. Trouser Semaphore enables this rather shy but passionate cove to express himself without consequent loss of face.



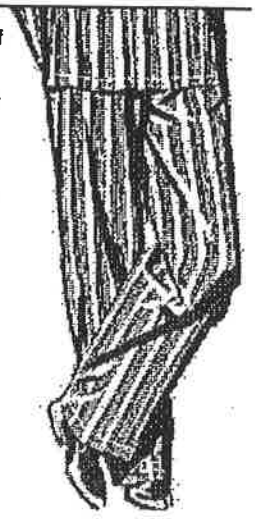
The Demonstrative

This sandal-sporting ne'er-do-well misuses Trouser Semaphore to express his displeasure at a stringent dress code and a lack of vegan comestibles on the menu. Surely his time would be far better spent acquiring a good tailor and sensible eating habits.



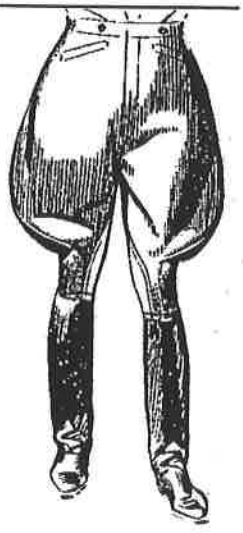
The Sublime

Spending vast tracts of time wearing one's pajamas is traditionally associated with a soaring intellect, a singularity of soul and a belief in personal freedom. This man's nonchalant leg crossing says "I am a man apart, a man of worth, a man of dignity".



The Self-Assured

Inspired by the self-defence mechanism of the European Natterjack toad, this fellow has used modern bicycle-pump technology to create a look calculated to strike fear into the heart of all but the most determined of muggers.



INTERNATIONAL ETIQUETTE

The Parvenu

The unattractive affectations of lottery winners and self-made persons of trade have been alluded to previously in these pages. Untramelled exhuberence is an emotion totally alien to a gentleman and potentially ruinous to a finely stitched gusset.

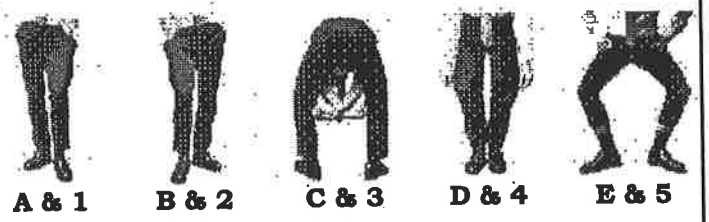
The Machiavellian

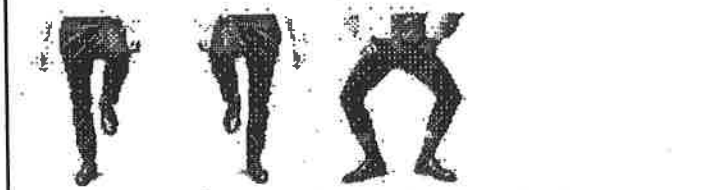
Heaven knows what twisted logic has allowed this man to plummet the depths of sartorial knavery. It can only be assumed that by using a cunning ruse known as "sad-trouser" this tennis player hopes to lure his adversary into unwarranted complacency.

The Retrouve

A wrong-headed notion known as "retro chic" is currently laying waste to our youth, who fondly imagine that by ironically donning the tawdry fashions of the 70s, they are somehow being clever and with it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Trouser Semaphore Alphabet





BURNING DIRT

Jeff Mahoney

"The Not-So-Fair Sex"

Women often think of men as EMOTIONALLY DISTANT. Though this is sometimes true, it's worth noting that there are IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS, as our friend Kyle's life illustrates ...
Yeah, that's right, dude, follow along to see the SENSITIVE SIDE of me that sometimes floats up like a dead rat on the river!
In situations where they haven't been socialized to be tough, guys can be affectionate and emotional, like with dogs.
Who's my little sweetpea? YOU are, that's who!
As women know, of course, guys aren't always so emotionally available.
Honey, I'd ... I'd like to talk about where our relationship's headed ...
Well, make it quick — game's on in five minutes.
Which is not to say that they don't try to be.
When I see Reggie Miller sink that long three-pointer ... I tell ya, man, I get misty.

burning_dirt@hotmail.com

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